

Computer Monitor & TV Recycling Options

In April 2000, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts adopted a first-in-the-nation approach to reuse and recycle discarded computer monitors and televisions. Cathode ray tubes (CRTs), the leaded glass picture tubes found in computer monitors and televisions, are now banned from disposal in Massachusetts landfills and waste combustors due to their high lead content.

Why are CRTs banned from Massachusetts landfills and waste combustors?

With digital televisions and faster, better computers flooding the market, millions of older televisions and computer monitors are destined for the trash. The National Recycling Coalition predicts that as many as 500 million computers will become obsolete by 2007. In Massachusetts alone, 25,000 tons of computers are being disposed, recycled, or placed in storage per year. These outdated electronics will further strain already limited landfill space.

In addition, CRT monitors and TVs contain an average of 4 pounds of lead each. Excessive lead and other toxins pose a problem in landfills because they can leach into groundwater or, in the case of a lined landfill, force expensive leachate treatment. In combustors, the lead winds up in the ash residue, which is in turn disposed of in landfills. In addition, the plastic material used to house electronic components often contains brominated flame-retardants. If improperly handled, these toxins could be released into the environment.

What do I do with my old computer monitor or television?

Prior to banning CRTs from solid waste facilities, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) assisted in developing programs and infrastructure to ensure that residents and businesses can recycle computers and televisions. Your options include the following:

- Ask if your municipality has a program for recycling computers and televisions. Most towns and cities in Massachusetts do and many of these programs were established with MassDEP grants.
- Check local TV repair shops, electronics retailer or electronics recycling companies to see if they accept computers, televisions, and other electronics for recycling from residents and small businesses.
- Consider donating your computer.

Although the disposal ban applies only to television sets and computer monitors, remember that most locations will allow you to recycle or donate your entire computer including the monitor, computer, keyboard and mouse.

What happens to my old computer or television?

Often, your computer will be reused by a charity or school. Or, it may be taken apart and recycled. The different parts of the computer or television are used in many different ways:

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- The glass CRT is either returned to a manufacturer and made into a new CRT, or sent to a smelter where the lead is recovered and recycled.
- The plastic housing is ground to smaller pieces and recycled for use in various items such as retaining blocks and pothole mix.
- Circuit boards, chips, and other parts can be reused to repair or upgrade older electronics or recycled for their scrap value.
- Metal components will be separated and sold for their scrap value

Recycle. A little effort makes a Big difference. For more information about electronics recycling in your community, visit www.earth911.org
